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## Decorative Arts of West Africa

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University of San Diego

Founders Gallery

**DECORATIVE ARTS OF WEST AFRICA**



**Founders Gallery**

**Thursday, February 17 through Friday, March 18  
12:30 p.m. through 4:30 p.m.**

This traveling exhibition of 70 African artifacts displays the decorative arts and utilitarian crafts of the varied cultures of nine West African countries.

*"From Picasso's paintings to the latest bed linens in the J.C. Penney catalog, from hip-hop street wear to upholstery fabrics, the influence of African art on the world is alive and burgeoning."*

*-- Philadelphia Inquirer review of  
"Decorative Arts of West Africa"*

For further information, please contact USD Fine Arts, 260-2280



DALLA  
P. JOURNAL  
THURS  
SEPT 9, 1993

# Art shows African influence on world

By Pheralyn Dove  
INQUIRER CORRESPONDENT

**COLLEGEVILLE** — From Picasso's paintings to the latest bed linens in the J.C. Penney catalog, from hip-hop street wear to upholstery fabrics, the influence of African art on the world is alive and burgeoning.

The origins of this 20th-century phenomenon can be found in traditional African cooking utensils, textiles, sculptures, ceremonial masks, baskets and musical instruments. Helping to put it all in perspective is a display of African artifacts that is set to open Tuesday.

"Decorative Arts of West Africa" will run through Oct. 24 at the Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College. It is a traveling exhibition, curated by Dorothy Van Arsdale, that originated at the Maitland Art Center in Maitland, Fla.

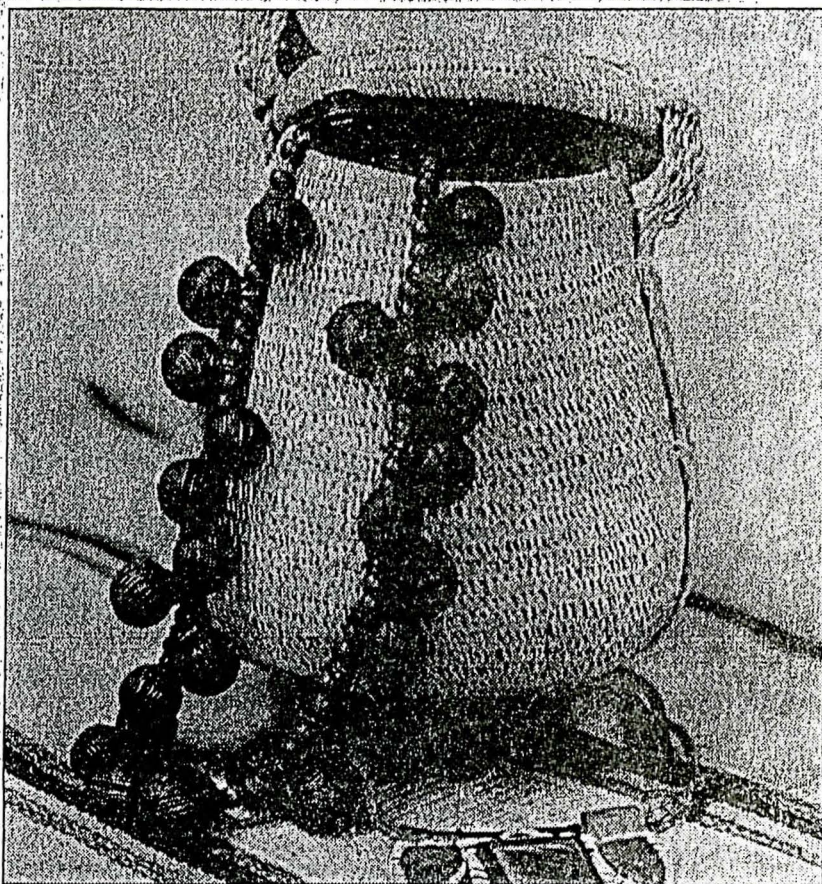
Most of the exhibition's about 70 pieces were gathered specifically for Van Arsdale during the early 1970s by artifact dealer Vivian Burns, who also organized a major showing of African artifacts during the late 1960s for the Whitney Museum in New York.

"The pieces were collected in sections, including clothing and personal adornment such as jewelry, cooking utensils, furniture, entertainment and musical instruments. I just wanted to tell what the daily life in West Africa was all about," Van Arsdale said from her home near Orlando, Fla.

"The design and workmanship have persisted through the ages," she said. "This proves that the different cultures have existed for many, many years, and it's important to know the cultures of the different nations. I'm interested in all cultures — a cultural exchange is what you'd call it."

As museum director Lisa Tremper Barnes worked earlier this week in the Berman vault, preparing the pieces for display in the gallery, she said, "This material is so gorgeously-crafted. They used all-natural colors, again and again. They took vegetables and fruits and drained the colors from them."

Included among the artifacts is what is now commonly used as a leather bracelet, originally intended



Among items in the exhibit are a covered basket, trade beads, a brass-bell necklace, an amulet and a woven mat.

as an archer's wrist protector. The ornament, made in northern Ghana, is simple in construction, featuring a band of leather with decorative designs painted on it.

Yellow dominates in the multicolored silk, handwoven Kente cloth from Ghana. There are also green, burgundy and shades of blue in this tapestry-like fabric, which combines warp and plain weaves to create strips of intricate designs. One pattern, a profusion of zigzags, is known as the burning bush. Another pattern, a crisscross diamond shape, is known as *afukwa mpua*, which translates into "hair-braiding" in the Twi language, spoken by the Asante tribe in Ghana.

Often, as with the piece on display in the Berman exhibition, these strips are sewn together to produce a large piece of cloth, which can be draped over the body and worn as clothing, especially by royalty in Ghana. Today, Kente has become very popular in the United States. Here, the strips, also made from cotton, are used to accessorize outfits. Uses for the larger pieces vary from wall hangings to tablecloths.

"Some of the techniques that are still being used for hand-weaving today are similar or the same as methods that were used originally. The first known hand-woven textiles were found in caves in Mali and were also found in Nigeria and Egypt," said Tahira Amatullah, a tex-

tile designer and president of Handmasters Textile Gallery in Philadelphia, a firm whose focus is the preservation of African culture.

Other textiles are included in the Berman exhibition, including ceremonial indigo tie-dyed cloth from Cameroun and an array of multitextured cotton fabrics from Liberia.

Meticulous, elaborate detail is the hallmark of a stunning bead-covered gourd decanter, made from a calabash in Cameroun. It features tiny beads of red, black, yellow, blue, white and green, some intertwined in the shape of interlocking snakes. The tall, elegant vessel is used to hold a native West African wine, made from the sap of a raffia palm. Under ordinary circumstances, only the king may drink wine poured directly from this ceremonial decanter.

## If You Go

**Time:** "Decorative Arts of West Africa" will be open from Tuesday through Oct. 24 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; noon to 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; closed Mondays.

**Price:** Free.

**Place:** Berman Museum of Art, Ursinus College, Collegeville.

**Phone:** 489-4111, Ext. 2354.